

## THE TENNESSEE PUBLIC LIBRARY HISTORY PROJECT

"From Backwoods to Cyberspace" is a project of the Tennessee Regional Library System, begun in the fall of 2000. The project's objectives are:

- To document the rich history of the development and growth of the public library system throughout the State of Tennessee;
- To preserve the photographs, documents, and memorabilia of the Tennessee Regional Library System and the public libraries of Tennessee;
- To document the memories of the people involved in the Tennessee public library movement before those memories are lost;
- To enlighten our community and government bodies about the services, programs and value of libraries.

### TO SUBMIT YOUR LIBRARY HISTORY TO THIS PROJECT

Submissions should be packaged carefully and sent to:

Tennessee Public Library History Project, c/o Lynette Sloan, Fort Loudoun Regional Library, 718 George Street, N.W., Athens, Tennessee 37303

### *Library Histories...Why They Are Important*

"Libraries are the memory of mankind, the storehouse that contains all which is known and has been thought. Were some holocaust to destroy all intellectual institutions except libraries, all could be re-created. But if the libraries were destroyed, all other institutions in the world could not re-create them." – From the forward by James Thomas Flexner, from ***For the People: Fighting for Public Libraries***, authors Whitney North Seymour, Jr. and Elizabeth N. Layne, 1979.

When the free public library was first developed in America in the nineteenth century it was, from the beginning, a unique institution. It was developed as a commitment to the same principals of free and open trade in ideas as the Constitution was itself. As time has progressed, this same commitment remains. In fact, our freedoms and system of government depend largely on citizens' free access to the recorded history and information stored on the shelves and databases of our public libraries.

In order to preserve this commitment and this principle, it is our duty to record the place that the public library has in our communities. The local public library is a reflection of its community, indicating its commitment to education, culture, family values, basic human freedoms and historic preservation. By recording the history of the individual public library, we will gain an understanding of the growth and development of the community that it serves.

Tenets of this project:

- You do not know where you are going, unless you understand where you have been.
- If we do not write it, someone else eventually will...and probably get it wrong!
- Think of the people that will follow you...will they have anything to go on when compiling reports or researching your history for grants or project proposals?
- For preservation purposes, historical documents (original or copies) concerning the library's history and development should be stored at the Tennessee State Library and Archives
- A central location for all public library histories will provide access to researchers and historians for a statewide concept of public library development

## THE PROJECT BEGINNING...A GATHERING OF FACTS AND MATERIALS

### Who Can Develop Your Library History Project?

The development of the local library history is not a project that could be, or should be, carried out by one individual. Although we suggest that one individual be the "project director", any group or individual involved with the library can participate:

- Current library staff
- Former or retired library staff
- Current or former library board trustees
- Library volunteers
- Friends of Library groups or individuals
- College students
- Garden club, Women's Club
- Community service workers

### Suggestions for Finding the Materials for Your Library History

Most public libraries in the state of Tennessee began with small community groups such as garden clubs, Family and Community Education groups (Home Extension clubs), and other community-spirited non-profit organizations that identified the need to establish a place to borrow books. The "places" were schools, private homes, groceries or dry goods stores, places where the public had relatively easy access, or more often than not, places where someone was willing to set aside space for a small collection of reading materials. So, how can you find the materials that document your history? Start in your own backyard...the FILING CABINET!

### What to Look For and Why

#### 1. First documents of a formal board (Minutes)

This would contain the original date of the meeting, and possibly the date of the first publicly-supported public library in your community, members of the board, the name of the librarian and any other staff, hours of operation, circulation records, policies and procedures.

#### 2. Circulation and Collection statistics

This information will indicate the size of the collection, types of materials available, and reading patterns of the community.

#### 3. Budgets

Many libraries were started on a volunteer basis with books being "donated" and the library "run" by volunteers. Budget reports provide the history of public support garnered during the stages of development.

#### 4. Photographs

Provides a visual history of the first (and any other) facilities that were used to house the public library. May also help identify early "movers and shakers" that started the concept of a free public library in your community.

#### 5. Media publicity

Local newspapers and radio stations scripts can provide a record of special events at the library, as well as a record of the place the library holds in the community. Letters to the editor, editorials, and special features concerning the library document the library history from an outside source.

#### 6. Correspondence

Early letters and memos to or from the library would indicate important events or issues that helped shape your library of today.

## **7. Invitations**

Groundbreaking and ribbon-cutting ceremonies are usually conducted with programs identifying the major contributors whether they are government entities, community groups or individuals.

## **8. Other possibilities**

While you are searching filing cabinets and storage areas you may be lucky enough to run across previous-written library histories, scrapbooks, diaries, annual reports and photo albums. These can provide a mine of information for your history project. Oral histories are also a good source of information.

## **Where to Look and Who Can Help**

### **1. Filing cabinets/library storage**

Check your filing cabinets and boxes found in storage areas of your library. You'll be surprised at the wealth of information you have in your own building.

### **2. Local newspaper microfilm**

If you have a date of the first library, you'll probably find an article in your local paper documenting the event. Documentation of other "important" library events could also be found here.

### **3. Retired (former) library staff and trustees**

Their memories and personal photographs can provide the key to documenting significant events in your history.

### **4. Your county historian or local historical society**

They may have documents to help you, including the actual document that established a publicly-funded library.

### **5. The Regional Library**

Your regional library may also provide you with dates and statistics – usually monthly and annual compilations of the statistics for your library. They may also have building programs and blue prints of your facility.

### **6. Local government records**

Your local government records (county court or commission) may provide a record of when the library was established as a publicly-funded entity.

### **7. Local civic clubs and organizations**

Ask these groups to check their histories and minutes for information about the library. The clubs that started the library will have the names and dates of volunteers. They may even have photographs that will enhance the project.

*"A library, to modify the famous metaphor of Socrates, should be the delivery room for the birth of ideas—a place where history comes to life." – Norman Cousins*

## Questions for Your Library History Project

*Please add any photos or documentation that you have for any question.*

### **The early days of library service in your community:**

1. What group or individual was responsible for the first public library service in your community? (Examples: Women's Club, Church Group)
2. What was the first hint of the establishment of "public" library service in your community?
3. Where was the first public library service in your community located? How much space was available for the first library?
4. What individual, business, or organization provided the first library space or building? Was it provided free, rented or purchased?
5. How were the materials gathered or purchased for the first library in your community? How many materials did it have? What was the operating budget of the first library?
6. Who was the first "librarian" or "custodian" of your first library?
7. What are the earliest circulation records that you can find for this first library?
8. What services did this library provide?

### **A true "public" library (funded with public governmental funds):**

1. When was your library formally established (or adopted) as a public governmental entity? By whom was it established? What was the first operating budget of this government-supported library?
2. Who was appointed to the first library board of trustees and when?
3. How much was the first governmental appropriation and from what government(s)?
4. Who was the first librarian hired after the formal establishment as a government-supported library?
5. What different types of library service did this first library provide to the community?

### **As your library "grew up":**

In how many different buildings or locations has your library been situated since the beginning to present day? Try to identify, describe and/or provide photos for each site.

If your library has been built as a "new library building" each time or at some time during its history, try to provide details about these new building projects:

- Types of fundraising
- Written building programs
- Architects, construction information, floor plans
- Photos of the building construction
- Library board of trustees at time of new construction
- Librarian at time of new construction

Try to find documentation for each new librarian:

- Name
- When hired
- Term of service
- Short biography
- Photo

Try to find documentation of board rosters through the years:

- Names of library trustees
- Dates appointed and term of service

### **Library service through the years**

Introduction of a new library service or program

- Description of new service or program
- Date of introduction

Special events (anniversaries, celebrations, book author visits, summer reading programs, advent of computers, new library automation system, etc.)

- Description of event
- Date of event
- Photos, newspaper articles, brochures, flyers, etc. to document event

Growth of service to the community

- Comparisons of circulation statistics, material holdings, and library budgets through the years

What did your community think about the library? Include samples of documents that reflect what the patrons or the media thought about the library and its service

- Letters to the editor
- Newspaper articles
- Newspaper editorials
- Thank-You letters from patrons
- Documentation about "gifts" to the library (memorials, trust deeds, legacies)
- Documentation about the "Friends of the Library" organization

### **Your library today**

1. From what sources does your library derive its operating funds today? How much is from governmental appropriations and how much is from private or other funds?
2. Who is on the library board of trustees today?
3. Provide a list of staff, their job titles and how long they have worked with the library. Include photos.
4. What is the size of the library collection today? Provide a breakdown by parts of the collection.
5. What are the activity statistics today? Circulation, number of registered borrowers, number of visitors annually, number and type of programs per year and attendance, etc.
6. Include documentation about the library building today: photos, floorplan, size, etc.

## ***ORGANIZING YOUR HISTORY...PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER***

It is best to organize your library's history in chronological order. Before you can do this, however, you need to gather all your materials and information together in one place.

1. Spread it all out on tables and group items by decade. Include all formats of information (newspaper articles, reports, correspondence, photos, etc.) – Don't worry yet about how the information is presented.
2. Now that you have it all laid out, look to see if there are any gaps in time in your materials. Where you notice gaps in time, delve into other resources to try and fill this gap. See other resources listed under section entitled, "Where to Look and Who Can Help."
3. Put your history in perspective – contact historical society or county historian to help paint a picture of what was going in the community or the world around it during each of these decades.
4. Identify date of first type of library service in your community (example: 1943-established as bookmobile deposit in local dry goods store by regional library).
5. From that date establish a time line for your library's history. Chronology should include critical events (evolution from bookmobile service point to formal library establishment, first board appointed, new library buildings, new librarians, major fundraising events, new services, etc.)
6. Decide how you want your timeline highlighted – by library building, by librarian, by major events, by decade (1920's, 1930's, 1940's).
7. Compare your library's chronology with local history books.
8. Highlight major or unusual events – they can get lost in long documents.
9. Review other library histories to gain ideas about how you want yours to look.

Possible layout:

- Narrative with attachments at end
  - Narrative with images and important documents inserted into the appropriate time slot
  - Chronology/timeline only
  - Photos and other mementos (newspaper articles, reports, etc.) by timeline only
10. Decide what media or format to use for the history – In almost any format you will need to layout on paper first, whether on computer or in typewritten form.

Possible format for reproduction and/or storage:

- |              |           |
|--------------|-----------|
| • Paper only | • DVD     |
| • Microfilm  | • Website |
| • Video      | • CD      |

## **Now that you have it all organized and all the decisions have been made...PUT IT TOGETHER!**

- Depending on your layout and format you may need some of the following equipment or supplies:

Computer	Acid-free paper
Scanner	Page protectors
Archival storage boxes	Notebook binder

## ***MAKE USE OF YOUR HISTORY...A TOOL FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE***

Now that you and your team have spent all this time and effort in developing and writing your library history, what can you, or should you, do with it? Your library history can be an important tool, one that can be used for multiple purposes. Don't just file it away at the back of a dusty file cabinet...make use of it to promote the library and ensure its future.

### **Mount it on a library website**

Use some of the interesting photographs and newspaper information to create a fascinating addition to your library website. This tool can help your public understand how the library has grown and adapted to serve the community.

### **Copy it to a CD or DVD**

Copy all the narrative portion of your library history, as well as the photos, newspaper clippings, historical correspondence, etc., to a CD or DVD. This will serve a couple of purposes. First, it will ensure that all the materials are gathered together in one place and will serve as a backup copy. Second, it will enable you to make copies of the materials for anyone who is entitled to a copy or just HAS to have one!

### **Create a library calendar**

Use photographs from the library's past to create a calendar for sale to the public as part of a fundraising effort.

### **Create a display**

Using memorabilia you discovered during your search for your library's history, you can create a display of photographs, newspaper clippings, brochures, documents, etc. This display could be mounted in the library, at schools, at the post office, in a local bank, at a local fair, or anywhere else the public visits.

### **Use as a "canned" presentation**

Now that you have it all gathered together, the library board members or the Friends of the Library organization may use your library history as a presentation to civic organizations in the community. Let them get the word out about your library!

### **Create a library brochure or booklet**

Use some of the fascinating facts and photos from library history to create a brochure or booklet that can be distributed to new library patrons, or given to the Chamber of Commerce, local governing bodies, civic organizations, schools or other groups. Including information about past, present, and future of the library will enable you to use this booklet for inclusion with grant applications, building programs, and new service proposals, as well.

### **Use for statistical analyses**

Pulling together all the library use statistics through the life of the library will enable you to use the information for all types of statistical analyses. Showing the growth of library use can be useful when requesting special funding for a new project or increased funding from your funding bodies.

### **Become a part of your community's history**

Provide a copy of your library history to your local historical society or county historian. This will ensure that your library takes its place in the history of your community. This will also provide the information necessary for researchers to develop a "well-rounded" picture of your community's history.

### **Have a library anniversary!**

What better way to celebrate your library and make it the focus of your community?! Have a library anniversary party and use your library history materials to create a display, honor the special people in your library's past (and present), and focus on how your library serves (and has served) its community.

### **Develop a marketing plan**

Incorporate aspects of your library history into your library's marketing (public relations) plan. Take pride in your past and use it as a background for your library's future. People love old photographs, especially when used side-by-side with a comparative photo from the present. Use this as a theme or component of your public relations plan.

### **Copies to the "Special People"**

Make special "presentation" copies of your library history documents. These presentation copies should go to the important or "special" people in your library's past or present, such as previous librarians, donors, and key government figures. One of these "presentations" would be a great photo opportunity for your local newspaper!

### **Make a preservation effort**

Make sure you provide a copy of your library history for the archives at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. This is a major component of this project, to ensure that your library's history is preserved for historical and research purposes. When you have completed the preparation of your library history, send a copy to:

Tennessee Public Library History Project  
c/o Lynette Sloan, Project Manager  
Fort Loudoun Regional Library  
718 George Street, N.W.  
Athens, Tennessee 37303

Following receipt of your history, it will be reviewed and prepared for the archives and sent to the Tennessee State Library and Archives by the Project Manager.

**AND...**

### **Preserve it at YOUR library!**

Last, but not least, preserve your library history at YOUR library, so that future librarians, board members and friends will have access to the remarkable history of your library. Take care to store it carefully and under the correct conditions. Follow the guidelines for preservation on page 10 of this manual, or call for more guidance from preservationists at the Tennessee State Library and Archives.



## ***PRESERVING YOUR HISTORY...FOR THE FUTURE***

Since a key component of this statewide project is to preserve the documents related to your library's history, no manual would be complete without addressing the basic guidelines necessary to preserve these materials. Further details concerning preservation can be found in some of the titles listed in our bibliography at the end of this manual.

### **Handling Documents and Photographs**

- Always use clean, dry hands when handling documents and photographs and negatives. It's best to wear white cotton gloves when handling photographs and negatives since the oils on the skin can accelerate deterioration.
- Use only pencil when working around papers and photographs. Remove all staples, paper clips, and rubber bands from materials to be preserved. If fasteners are to be used, use only stainless steel staples, and stainless steel or plastic paper clips.
- If documents or photographs are lightly soiled and need to be cleaned, use only a clean, soft, dusting brush. If documents and photographs are extremely soiled they may need professional conservation.
- Do not use pen or ink, commercial dusting cloths, or cleaning solutions on documents, photographs, and negatives.
- If documents are torn they can be encapsulated in a Mylar (polyester) sleeve, or in a folder piece of acid-free archival paper.
- Keep all food, beverages, and tobacco products away from documents and photographs.

### **Folders and Containers**

- Folders and containers used to house documents and photographs should be made of acid-free, archival-quality (preferably buffered) paper and fiber board.
- Do not overstuff boxes; use acid-free spacers to hold records in partially filled boxes.
- Flatten folded documents or unroll rolled documents (if unrolling will not crack or break the document), then house in oversize boxes.

### **Environment**

- The holding area for archival materials should be clean, dust-free, free of insects and rodents, and protected from direct sunlight. Ultra violet (UV) rays in sunlight and in fluorescent lights can alter the chemical composition of documents and photographs causing rapid deterioration, so it's best to keep materials in boxes. Exposure of materials to light or direct sunlight should be kept to a minimum.
- The appropriate environment for archiving papers and photographs is important for their long-term preservation. Optimal temperature and humidity for preserving these materials is 65-68 degrees Fahrenheit, with 45-50% relative humidity. If these numbers cannot be attained, an acceptable range would be 69-72 degrees Fahrenheit, with 51-55% relative humidity. In any case, stability is the key. Rapid fluctuation in temperature and humidity causes the fibers in paper to expand and contract leading to deterioration. There should be good air flow and exchange; stagnant air produces heat and thus encourages mold growth.
- Keep all food, beverages, and tobacco products away from documents and photographs and out of holding areas.

*Preservation guidelines provided by Jay Richiuso, Director, Archival Technical Services, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee*

## Selected Resource List

### SAMPLE LIBRARY HISTORIES ON THE INTERNET

South Carolina Library History Project -- <http://www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/>  
Boston (MA) Public Library -- <http://www.bpl.org/guides/history.htm>  
Redwood (RI) Library -- <http://www.redwoodlibrary.org/about.htm>  
Wisconsin Rapids (WI) -- <http://www.scls.lib.wi.us/mcmillan/history/library/index.html>  
Great Britain library history database -- <http://www.r-alston.co.uk/contents.htm>  
Library of Congress -- <http://lcweb.loc.gov/loc/legacy/loc.html>  
Middletown (NY) -- <http://thrall.org/study/>  
New York Public Library -- <http://www.nypl.org/admin/pro/history.html>  
High Point (NC) Public Library -- <http://www.hipopl.org/history/index.html>  
Durham (NC) Public Library -- <http://www.durhamcountylibrary.org/ncc/dclhist/00main.htm>

### WEBLINKS ABOUT LIBRARY HISTORY

ALA Library History Roundtable -- <http://www.spertus.edu/library-history/>  
Library History Study Links (Canada) -- <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~lbruce/links.html>  
The Carnegie Libraries of Ohio -- <http://www.seventalent.com/OCLExhibit/index.html>  
I FLA Roundtable on Library History -- <http://www.ifla.org/VII/rt8/rtlh.htm>

### TITLES ABOUT LIBRARY HISTORY

Donald G. Davis and John M. Tucker, *American Library History: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature*. ABC-CLIO, 1989.  
Harris, Michael H., *American Library History: A Bibliography*. University of Texas Press, 1978.  
Harris, Michael H., *A Guide to Research in American Library History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Scarecrow Press, 1974.  
Theodore Jones, *Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy*. John Wiley, 1997.  
Don Heinrich Tolzmann and others, *The Memory of Mankind: The Story of Libraries Since the Dawn of History*. Oak Knoll, 2001.  
Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. Univ. of Chicago, 1998.

### TITLES ABOUT ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPTS PRESERVATION/ COLLECTION

Fredric M. Miller, *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts*. Society of American Archivists, 1990.  
Sherelyn Ogden, Ed., *Preservation of Library and Archival Materials: A Manual*. Revised and Expanded. Northeast Document Conservation Center, 1994.  
James M. O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*. Society of American Archivists, 1990.  
Faye Phillips, *Local History Collections in Libraries*. Libraries Unlimited, 1995.  
Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, *Archives and Manuscripts: Administration of Photographic Collections*. Society of American Archivists, 1984.  
*Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*. Society of American Archivists, 1993.  
Craig Tuttle, *An Ounce of Preservation: A Guide to the Care of Papers and Photographs*. Rainbow Books, 1995.  
Thomas Wilsted and William Nolte, *Managing Archival and Manuscript Repositories*. Society of American Archivists, 1991.  
Elizabeth Yakel, *Starting An Archives*. Society of American Archivists, 1994.

## ***ARCHIVAL SUPPLY VENDORS***

Conservation Resources International, LLC  
8000-H Forbes Place  
Springfield, VA 22151  
Phone: 800-634-6932  
Fax: 703-321-0629  
Email: [criusa@conservationresources.com](mailto:criusa@conservationresources.com)  
Web: [www.conservationresources.com](http://www.conservationresources.com)

Gaylord Archival Products  
P. O. Box 4901  
Syracuse, NY 13221-4901  
Phone: 800-448-6160  
Fax: 800-272-3412  
Email: [orders@gaylord.com](mailto:orders@gaylord.com)  
Web: [www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)

Hollinger Corporation  
P. O. Box 8360  
Fredericksburg, VA 22404-8360  
Phone: 800-634-0491  
Fax: 800-947-8814  
Email: [Hollingercorp@erols.com](mailto:Hollingercorp@erols.com)  
Web: [www.hollingercorp.com](http://www.hollingercorp.com)

Light Impressions  
P. O. Box 22708  
Rochester, NY 14692-2708  
Phone: 800-828-6216  
Fax: 800-828-5539  
Web: [www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)

Metal Edge, Inc.  
Archival Storage Materials  
6340 Bandini Blvd.  
Commerce, CA 90040  
Phone: 800-862-2228  
Web: [www.metaledgeinc.com](http://www.metaledgeinc.com)

University Products  
517 main Street  
Holyoke, MA 01041-0101  
Phone: 800-628-1912  
Fax: 800-532-9281  
Email: [info@universityproducts.com](mailto:info@universityproducts.com)  
Web: [www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)

Many archival book titles may be purchased from:  
Society of American Archivists  
527 S. Wells Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago, IL 606-7  
PH: 312.922.0140  
FAX: 312.347.1452  
Web: [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)

### **PROJECT CREDITS**

"From Backwoods to Cyberspace" is a project of the Tennessee Regional Library System

#### **Project Team:**

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Cookeville, Tennessee

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#### **Our Special Thanks to:**

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